

April 2008

# HOMELAND DEFENSE

## Steps Have Been Taken to Improve U.S. Northern Command's Coordination with States and the National Guard Bureau, but Gaps Remain



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Highlights of [GAO-08-252](#), a report to congressional requesters

## Why GAO Did This Study

In 2002, the Department of Defense (DOD) established U.S. Northern Command (NORTHCOM) to conduct homeland defense and civil support missions in and around the United States. It is important that NORTHCOM coordinate with the National Guard Bureau (NGB), because NGB has experience dealing with state and local authorities during incidents and functions as NORTHCOM's formal link to the states. GAO was asked to (1) determine the extent to which NORTHCOM has ongoing efforts to coordinate with the states and NGB in planning, exercises and other preparedness activities and (2) identify the extent to which there are any gaps in this coordination. To do this, GAO surveyed the state adjutants general, the highest ranking guardsman in each state, and received a 100 percent response rate, and reviewed interagency coordination plans and guidance.

## What GAO Recommends

To improve NORTHCOM's coordination with the states, GAO recommends that NORTHCOM develop an established and thorough process to guide its coordination with the states. To improve the command's coordination with NGB, GAO recommends that NORTHCOM and NGB revise their agreement to more fully and clearly define how they will coordinate and the responsibilities each will have. DOD generally agreed with our recommendations and suggested ongoing and future efforts to satisfy the intent of the recommendations.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-252](#). For more information, contact Davi M. D'Agostino at (202) 512-5431 or [dagostinod@gao.gov](mailto:dagostinod@gao.gov).

## HOMELAND DEFENSE

### Steps Have Been Taken to Improve U.S. Northern Command's Coordination with States and the National Guard Bureau, but Gaps Remain

## What GAO Found

NORTHCOM has several ongoing efforts to improve coordination with the states and NGB in planning for its missions and responding to requests for civil support. For example, during hurricane season NORTHCOM facilitates weekly conferences with the relevant local, state, and federal emergency management officials, through which it has begun to build more productive relationships. NORTHCOM also conducted two large-scale exercises and participated in over 30 smaller regional, state, and local exercises annually to help responders prepare for man-made and natural disasters. In addition, NORTHCOM has been informally including NGB in reviewing its plans.

We identified gaps in coordination between NORTHCOM, the states, and NGB in three areas.

- NORTHCOM officials minimally involved the states in the development of its homeland defense and civil support plans. Less than 25 percent of the state adjutants general reported that they were involved in developing and reviewing these plans. For civil support, NORTHCOM officials told us that they are reaching out directly to states to better understand states' plans and capabilities, but for homeland defense, they rely on NGB to provide states' perspectives.
- NORTHCOM was not familiar with state emergency response plans and has no process for obtaining this information. Fifty-four percent of the state adjutants general reported that they believed that NORTHCOM was not at all or only slightly familiar with their states' emergency response plans. This may be attributable, in part, to the fact that NORTHCOM does not have an established and thorough process for cooperating and interacting with the states. By not obtaining and using information on states' plans and capabilities, NORTHCOM increases the risk that it will not be prepared to respond to an incident with the needed resources to support civil authorities.
- A 2005 agreement, which is intended to provide the procedures by which NORTHCOM and NGB interact, does not clearly define each agency's roles and responsibilities for planning for homeland defense and civil support. The lack of clearly defined roles and responsibilities has resulted in confusion and duplicative or wasted efforts. For example, as required in NORTHCOM's homeland defense plan, NGB compiled the states' homeland defense plans and made them available to NORTHCOM; however, NORTHCOM planners told us that they neither requested nor needed access to this information. Without clearly defined roles and responsibilities, there is a risk that NORTHCOM's and NGB's responses to an event could be fragmented and uncoordinated.

Addressing these gaps could help integrate intergovernmental planning for catastrophic incidents, enhance overall coordination, and help ensure that NORTHCOM's plans for its missions and responses to incidents are as effective as possible.

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# Contents

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<b>Letter</b>		<b>1</b>
	Results in Brief	5
	Background	7
	NORTHCOM Has Ongoing Efforts to Improve Coordination with the States and NGB in Planning for Its Missions	17
	Gaps Remain in NORTHCOM's Coordination with the States and NGB	23
	Conclusions	33
	Recommendations for Executive Action	34
	Agency Comments and Our Evaluation	34

---

<b>Appendix I</b>	<b>Questionnaire and Survey Results</b>	<b>38</b>
-------------------	---	-----------

---

<b>Appendix II</b>	<b>Scope and Methodology</b>	<b>43</b>
--------------------	------------------------------	-----------

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<b>Appendix III</b>	<b>Comments from the Department of Defense</b>	<b>46</b>
---------------------	--	-----------

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<b>Appendix IV</b>	<b>GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments</b>	<b>49</b>
--------------------	--	-----------

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<b>Related GAO Products</b>		<b>50</b>
-----------------------------	--	-----------

---

<b>Tables</b>		
	Table 1: State Participation in NORTHCOM Exercises	18
	Table 2: TAG Familiarity with NORTHCOM's Plans	24
	Table 3: TAG Involvement in NORTHCOM's Plan Development	24
	Table 4: NORTHCOM's Familiarity with State Emergency Response Plans	27

---

<b>Figures</b>		
	Figure 1: NORTHCOM's Area of Responsibility	8
	Figure 2: Homeland Defense Response	10

---

Figure 3: Defense Support of Civil Authorities Response	13
Figure 4: FEMA Regions	22

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**Abbreviations**

CBRNE	chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and high-yield explosive
DCO	defense coordinating officer
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
DOD	Department of Defense
EMAC	Emergency Management Assistance Compact
EPLO	emergency preparedness liaison officer
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
JPEC	Joint Planning and Execution Community
JTF-CS	Joint Task Force Civil Support
NGB	National Guard Bureau
NORTHCOM	U.S. Northern Command
TAG	state adjutant general

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United States Government Accountability Office  
Washington, DC 20548

April 16, 2008

#### Congressional Requesters

The United States homeland continues to face an uncertain, complex security environment with the potential for terrorist incidents and natural disasters. After the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, the President established the U.S. Northern Command (NORTHCOM) to provide and manage homeland defense and civil support. The Department of Defense (DOD) considers homeland defense to be NORTHCOM's primary mission and defines it as the protection of U.S. sovereignty, territory, domestic population, and critical defense infrastructure against external threats and aggression against the United States.<sup>1</sup> Civil support or defense support of civil authorities<sup>2</sup> includes the use of federal military forces, the department's career civilian and contractor personnel, and DOD agency and component assets for domestic emergencies and for designated law enforcement and other activities.<sup>3</sup> DOD is not the primary federal agency for such missions (unless designated so by the President) and thus operates in support of civil authorities only when directed to do so by the President or the Secretary of Defense. NORTHCOM's area of responsibility for its homeland defense mission includes the contiguous United States, Alaska, Canada, and Mexico.<sup>4</sup> NORTHCOM's area of responsibility for its civil support mission includes the contiguous United States, Alaska, and U.S. territorial waters.<sup>5</sup>

NORTHCOM faces the critical and unique challenge of preparing for its missions within the legal and historical limits of the constitutional federal-state structure that includes the 49 North American U.S. states and the District of Columbia. Numerous local, state, and federal agencies and

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<sup>1</sup>Department of Defense, *Strategy for Homeland Defense and Civil Support* (Washington, D.C.: June 2005), 5.

<sup>2</sup>DOD refers to civil support operations conducted in accordance with the *National Response Framework* as Defense Support of Civil Authorities. See Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Pub. 3-28, *Civil Support*, GL-7.

<sup>3</sup>Department of Defense, *Strategy for Homeland Defense and Civil Support*, 5-6.

<sup>4</sup>Hawaii and Guam are under the area of responsibility of U.S. Pacific Command, and Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands are under the area of responsibility of U.S. Southern Command.

<sup>5</sup>NORTHCOM's geographical boundaries for defense support of civil authorities do not include Canada and Mexico unless coordinated in advance with the State Department.

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organizations, including the National Guard Bureau (NGB),<sup>6</sup> have jurisdiction over or can coordinate resources within the homeland and, therefore, may be involved in a response to an incident.<sup>7</sup> Because protecting and defending the homeland is a shared responsibility with states potentially requiring assistance from federal agencies and organizations, effective coordination and integrated planning across all levels are critical for an effective national response.<sup>8</sup> We have previously reported that to facilitate rapid and effective decision making during a crisis, legal authorities, roles and responsibilities, and lines of authority at all government levels must be clearly defined, effectively communicated, and well understood.<sup>9</sup> NORTHCOM also recognizes the importance of coordination with other federal agencies and states for its missions, especially in support of civil authorities, stating that such coordination will facilitate the creation and implementation of coordinated policies, collaborative plans, and unified operations.<sup>10</sup>

Since the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks and, more recently, the uncoordinated national response to Hurricane Katrina, Congress and other organizations have emphasized the need to improve the national response

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<sup>6</sup>NGB is a joint activity of DOD. It coordinates the deployment of nonfederalized National Guard forces and provides NORTHCOM with situational awareness of National Guard issues and activities, including capabilities and requirements. NGB does not have jurisdiction over resources. Nonfederalized or Title 32 forces are under the control of the governor of the state. During a presidential call-up, National Guard forces can be mobilized under Title 10 and federalized. In this case, they are under the control of the President.

<sup>7</sup>An incident refers to a natural or man-made disaster, ranging from a hurricane to a terrorist attack, that requires action to prevent or minimize loss of life or damage to property and/or natural resources.

<sup>8</sup>Homeland Security Council, *National Strategy for Homeland Security* (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 2007).

<sup>9</sup>GAO, *Homeland Security: Observations on DHS and FEMA Efforts to Prepare for and Respond to Major and Catastrophic Disasters and Address Related Recommendations and Legislation*, [GAO-07-1142T](#) (Washington, D.C.: July 31, 2007). A list of related products is included at the end of this report.

<sup>10</sup>U.S. Northern Command, *State and Tribal Engagement Strategy*, Draft (Colorado Springs, Colo., undated).

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to an incident.<sup>11</sup> For example, the Commission on the National Guard and Reserves found that reform is necessary to increase coordination among DOD entities and commands—including NGB and NORTHCOM—to ensure better national security outcomes.<sup>12</sup> The relationship of NORTHCOM and NGB is even more important with Congress’s recent passing of legislation to elevate NGB to a joint activity of DOD and expand NGB’s functions to include assisting the Secretary of Defense with coordinating the use of National Guard forces and resources with other federal agencies, the adjutants general of the states, U.S. Joint Forces Command, and NORTHCOM for their use in operations conducted under Title 32 or in support of state missions.<sup>13</sup> Although NGB is NORTHCOM’s formal channel of coordination with states for National Guard related matters, NORTHCOM also coordinates with the states through the state adjutants general, known as TAGs—the highest-ranking guardsman in each state. As the commander of the state’s National Guard units, the governor of each state commands the National Guard through the TAG.

To better understand NORTHCOM’s efforts to effectively prepare for its homeland defense and civil support missions, we were asked to review NORTHCOM’s processes for planning for, coordinating, and executing its missions. For this report, our objectives were to (1) determine the extent to which NORTHCOM has ongoing efforts to coordinate with the states and NGB in planning exercises and other preparedness activities and (2) identify the extent to which there are any gaps in this coordination. We prepared a separate report to address (1) the status of NORTHCOM’s plans and the challenges it faces in planning and conducting operations,

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<sup>11</sup>White House, *The Federal Response to Hurricane Katrina: Lessons Learned* (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 23, 2006); House of Representatives, *A Failure of Initiative: Final Report of the Select Bipartisan Committee to Investigate the Preparation for and Response to Hurricane Katrina* (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 15, 2006); U.S. Senate, *Hurricane Katrina: A Nation Still Unprepared* (Washington, D.C.: May 2006); and GAO, *Hurricane Katrina: Better Plans and Exercises Needed to Guide the Military’s Response to Catastrophic Natural Disasters*, [GAO-06-808T](#) (Washington, D.C.: May 25, 2006).

<sup>12</sup>Commission on the National Guard and Reserves, *Strengthening America’s Defenses in the New Security Environment* (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 1, 2007).

<sup>13</sup>Pub. L. No. 110-181, §§ 1812 and 1813 (2008), which are codified at 10 U.S.C. §§ 10501 and 10503 (2007).



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(2) the adequacy of planning personnel, and (3) the extent to which NORTHCOM coordinates with other federal agencies.<sup>14</sup>

In conducting this review, we focused our scope on NORTHCOM's coordination with the states and NGB in planning and preparing for its homeland defense and civil support missions. Our review focused on NORTHCOM's coordination efforts since Hurricane Katrina in 2005. To determine the states' perspectives on the extent to which NORTHCOM is coordinating with the states and identify any gaps, we surveyed the TAGs who are within NORTHCOM's area of responsibility.<sup>15</sup> When we discuss NORTHCOM's coordination with the states, we are primarily referring to coordination with the TAGs. The survey questionnaire and results can be found in appendix I. The survey was administered via electronic mail to the TAGs and their chiefs of staff, and responses were collected from April through September 2007; we had a 100 percent response rate. We also reviewed documents and conducted interviews with the TAGs from Florida, Indiana, Nebraska, and Washington. To augment the information we obtained from the TAGs, we reviewed documents and conducted interviews with officials from NORTHCOM and several of its subordinate commands, including Joint Task Force-Civil Support (JTF-CS), Joint Force Headquarters National Capital Region, and Army Forces North, as well as officials from NGB headquarters and the NORTHCOM National Guard Office. In addition, we conducted interviews with officials from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) interagency Incident Management Planning Team. We conducted our review from April 2007 to April 2008 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. Appendix II is a detailed discussion of our scope and methodology.

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<sup>14</sup>GAO, *Homeland Defense: U.S. Northern Command Has Made Progress but Needs to Address Force Allocation, Readiness Tracking Gaps, and Other Issues*, [GAO-08-251](#) (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 16, 2008).

<sup>15</sup>This includes those in the 48 contiguous states as well as Alaska and the District of Columbia.

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## Results in Brief

NORTHCOM has several ongoing efforts to improve coordination with the states and NGB in planning for its missions and responding to requests for civil support. NORTHCOM's strategic vision includes facilitating the synchronization of national, state, and local assets and capabilities to defend the nation and support civilian authorities.<sup>16</sup> One of NORTHCOM's ongoing efforts to improve coordination includes facilitating weekly hurricane conferences during hurricane season with a wide variety of relevant local, state, and federal emergency management officials. Similarly, NORTHCOM monitors wildfire activity and sets up teleconferences with the National Interagency Fire Center, which includes state emergency response officials, if it appears that NORTHCOM may need to assist in fighting the fires. NORTHCOM also conducts two large-scale exercises—Ardent Sentry and Vigilant Shield—and participates in over 30 smaller regional, state, and local exercises annually to help all potential responders prepare for potential man-made and natural disasters. As a result of this frequent interaction, NORTHCOM has begun to build more productive and effective relationships with the participating states and agencies. In addition, NORTHCOM has been informally including NGB in reviewing its plans, both in the early stages during concept development workshops as well as during final coordination.

We identified gaps in coordination between NORTHCOM, the states, and NGB in three areas.

- NORTHCOM officials minimally involve the states in the development of NORTHCOM's major homeland defense and civil support plans. Less than 25 percent of the TAGs reported that they were involved in developing and reviewing these plans. NORTHCOM officials told us that they are starting to reach out directly to states to obtain their perspectives on NORTHCOM's defense support of civil authorities plan, but for homeland defense, they rely on NGB to provide states' perspectives. By only relying on NGB, NORTHCOM may not be able to maintain awareness of the environment in which it may be operating, which is critical to fully carrying out its homeland defense mission. In either homeland defense or civil support, increasing the current level of state involvement in the development of NORTHCOM's plans could help integrate intergovernmental planning for catastrophic incidents, enhance overall

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<sup>16</sup>U.S. Northern Command, *Concept of Operations* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: June 13, 2005).

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coordination, and help ensure that NORTHCOM's plans for its missions and responses to incidents are as effective as possible.<sup>17</sup>

- NORTHCOM was not familiar with state emergency response plans or capabilities and has no established and thorough process for gaining access to this information. Fifty-four percent of the TAGs reported that they believe that NORTHCOM is either slightly or not at all familiar with their states' plans. This may be attributable in part to the fact that NORTHCOM does not have a plan for cooperating and interacting with the states. By not obtaining and using information on states' plans and capabilities, it is difficult for NORTHCOM to plan in advance for the types, numbers, and timing of capabilities (trained personnel and equipment) needed to actually conduct an operation either for homeland defense or for a civil support operation in support of another primary agency.<sup>18</sup>
- A 2005 memorandum of agreement, which is intended to provide the procedures by which NORTHCOM and NGB interact, does not clearly define the responsibilities of the two entities for homeland defense and civil support. The lack of clearly defined roles and responsibilities has resulted in confusion and duplicative or potentially wasted efforts between the two agencies. For example, as required in NORTHCOM's homeland defense plan, NGB compiled the states' homeland defense plans and made them available to NORTHCOM; however, NORTHCOM planners told us that they neither requested nor needed access to this information. Without clearly defined responsibilities, there is a risk that NORTHCOM's and NGB's responses to an event could be fragmented and uncoordinated.

To improve NORTHCOM's coordination with the states, we are recommending that NORTHCOM develop an established and thorough process to guide its coordination with the states to (1) involve the states in NORTHCOM's planning processes, (2) obtain information on state emergency response plans and capabilities, and (3) use such information to improve the development and execution of its concept plans. To improve the command's coordination with NGB, we are recommending that NORTHCOM and NGB revise their memorandum of agreement and

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<sup>17</sup> Catastrophic incidents by their nature cut across geographic and political boundaries, and these events require fully integrated intergovernmental actions. See Department of Homeland Security, *Nationwide Plan Review: Phase 2 Report* (Washington, D.C.: June 16, 2006).

<sup>18</sup> [GAO-08-251](#).

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more fully and clearly define the roles and responsibilities that each will have.

In written comments on a draft of this report, DOD generally agreed with our recommendations and discussed steps it is taking and planning to take to address the recommendations. DOD's comments are discussed in more detail at the end of this report and are reproduced in full in appendix III. DOD and FEMA also provided us with technical comments, which have been incorporated where appropriate.

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## Background

Following the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, DOD realized the need for a more integrated civilian and military response capability for any future attack on the United States. In response, DOD established NORTHCOM in October 2002<sup>19</sup> to provide command and control in homeland defense efforts and to coordinate defense support of civil authorities within its area of responsibility (see fig. 1).<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>The command was created in April 2002 as part of a revised Unified Command Plan, which outlines the areas of responsibility for the combatant commands.

<sup>20</sup>NORTHCOM's area of responsibility for its homeland defense mission includes the contiguous United States, Alaska, U.S. territorial waters, and Canada and Mexico. NORTHCOM's area of responsibility for its civil support mission includes the contiguous United States, Alaska, and U.S. territorial waters.

**Figure 1: NORTHCOM's Area of Responsibility**



Sources: GAO analysis; Map Resources (map).

NORTHCOM's mission consists of (1) homeland defense and (2) civil support. It is important to understand the relationships between NORTHCOM's missions and homeland security. Homeland defense and homeland security are not synonymous. Homeland security is a concerted national effort to prevent terrorist attacks within the United States, reduce America's vulnerability to terrorism, and minimize the damage and recover

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from attacks that do occur.<sup>21</sup> The DHS is the primary federal agency for homeland security issues. DHS's responsibilities extend beyond terrorism to preventing, preparing for, responding to, and recovering from a wide range of matter domestic disasters and other emergencies. DOD contributes to homeland security through its military missions overseas and homeland defense and civil support operations.

While the terrorism portion of homeland security is concerned with preventing terrorist attacks within the United States, DOD's concerns include responding to conventional and unconventional attacks by any adversary as well as terrorists. When DOD is designated as the primary federal agency by the President or Secretary of Defense for conducting military missions to defend the people or territory of the homeland, it is considered to be homeland defense. Homeland defense is the protection of U.S. territory, sovereignty, domestic population, and critical defense infrastructure against external threats and aggression. DOD activity in support of a *National Response Framework* primary or coordinating agency is considered to be civil support. Civil support is DOD support to U.S. civilian authorities, such as DHS, for domestic emergencies, both natural and man-made, and includes the use of DOD personnel—federal military forces and DOD's career civilian and contractor personnel—and DOD agency and component resources.<sup>22</sup> Because these missions are complex and interrelated, they require significant interagency coordination.

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## NORTHCOM's Homeland Defense Mission

To carry out its homeland defense mission, NORTHCOM is to conduct operations to deter, prevent, and defeat threats and aggression aimed at the United States. According to Joint Publication 3-27, DOD is the primary federal agency for homeland defense operations, and NORTHCOM is the combatant command responsible for commanding and coordinating a response to a homeland defense incident. In this case, the chain of command is relatively straightforward: other DOD commands and federal agencies provide support to NORTHCOM for homeland defense operations (see fig. 2). Although NORTHCOM has few forces assigned to its command, during an incident it requests forces through the Joint Staff.

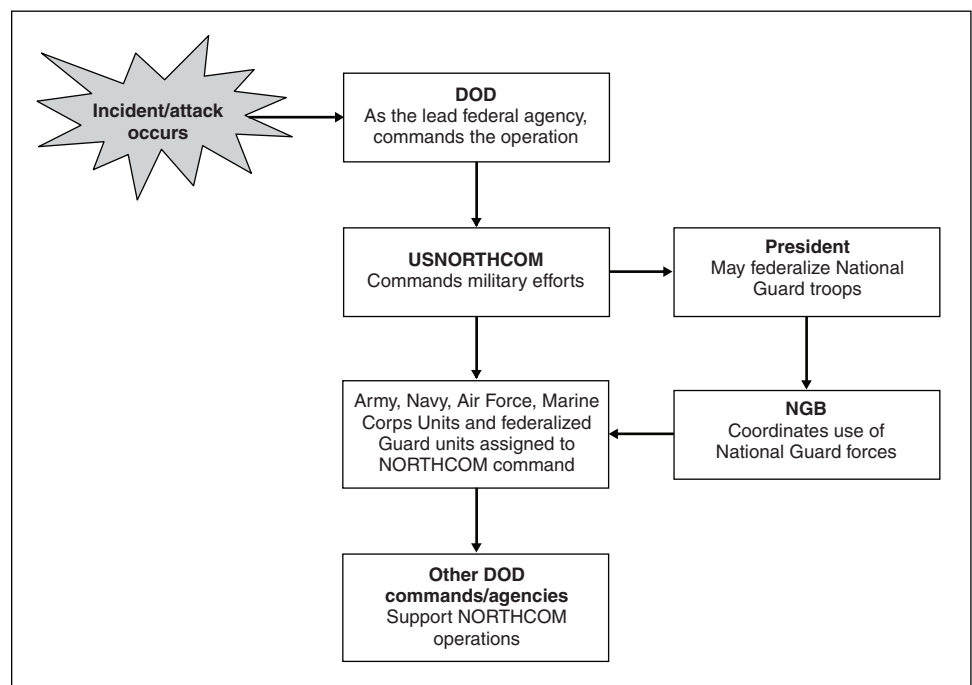
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<sup>21</sup>Homeland defense is considered DOD's portion of the broader area of homeland security. Homeland Security Council, *National Strategy for Homeland Security*, 3, and Department of Defense, *Strategy for Homeland Defense and Civil Support*, 5.

<sup>22</sup>Department of Defense, *Strategy for Homeland Defense and Civil Support*, 5-6.

The Joint Staff will direct Joint Forces Command, which is DOD's joint force provider, to assign appropriate and available forces to NORTHCOM.<sup>23</sup> The President may decide to federalize National Guard units in order to provide these forces.<sup>24</sup>

**Figure 2: Homeland Defense Response**



Source: GAO.

While the states do not have an operational role in homeland defense,

<sup>23</sup>NORTHCOM and the other combatant commands transmit their force requirements (forces needed to execute their planned operations) to Joint Forces Command, and the latter determines which mix of trained military service units (Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines) will provide the requested forces. Joint Forces Command assigns these forces to combatant commanders when requested by the Joint Staff. See White House, *Unified Command Plan* (Washington, D.C., May 5, 2006) and Joint Pub. 5), *Joint Operation Planning* (Dec. 26, 2006), I-10. In addition, any other combatant command to which forces have been assigned by DOD, such as U.S. Pacific Command, could also be directed to provide forces to NORTHCOM.

<sup>24</sup>During a presidential call-up, National Guard forces can be mobilized under Title 10 and federalized. In this case, they are under the control of the President. Nonfederalized or Title 32 forces are under the control of the governor of the state.

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NORTHCOM's homeland defense mission includes protecting the territory or domestic population of the United States as well as the infrastructure or other assets determined by the Secretary of Defense to be critical to national security. In order to protect these critical assets, NORTHCOM must maintain awareness of the environment in which it may be operating, including critical infrastructure locations relevant to its operations.

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## NORTHCOM's Civil Support Mission

NORTHCOM's second mission is civil support or defense support of civil authorities. Civil support missions include domestic disaster relief operations for incidents such as fires, hurricanes, floods, and earthquakes. Such support also includes counterdrug operations and management of the consequences of a terrorist incident employing a weapon of mass destruction. DOD is not the primary federal agency for such missions (unless so designated by the President) and thus provides defense support of civil authorities only when (1) state, local, and other federal resources are overwhelmed or unique military capabilities are required; (2) assistance is requested by the primary federal agency; and (3) NORTHCOM is directed to do so by the President or the Secretary of Defense.<sup>25</sup>

Civil support is based on a tiered response to an incident; that is, incidents must be managed at the lowest jurisdictional levels and supported by additional response capabilities when needed (see fig. 3). Local and county governments respond to emergencies daily using their own resources and rely on mutual aid agreements and other types of assistance agreements with neighboring governments when they need additional resources. For example, county and local authorities are likely to have the resources needed to adequately respond to a small-scale incident, such as a local flood, and therefore will not request additional resources. For larger-scale incidents, when resources are overwhelmed, local and county governments will request assistance from the state. States have capabilities, such as the National Guard, that can help communities respond and recover. If additional resources are required, the state may request assistance from other states through interstate mutual aid agreements, such as the Emergency Management Assistance Compact

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<sup>25</sup>Department of Homeland Security, *National Response Framework* (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 2008), and Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Pub. 3-28, *Civil Support* (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 14, 2007).



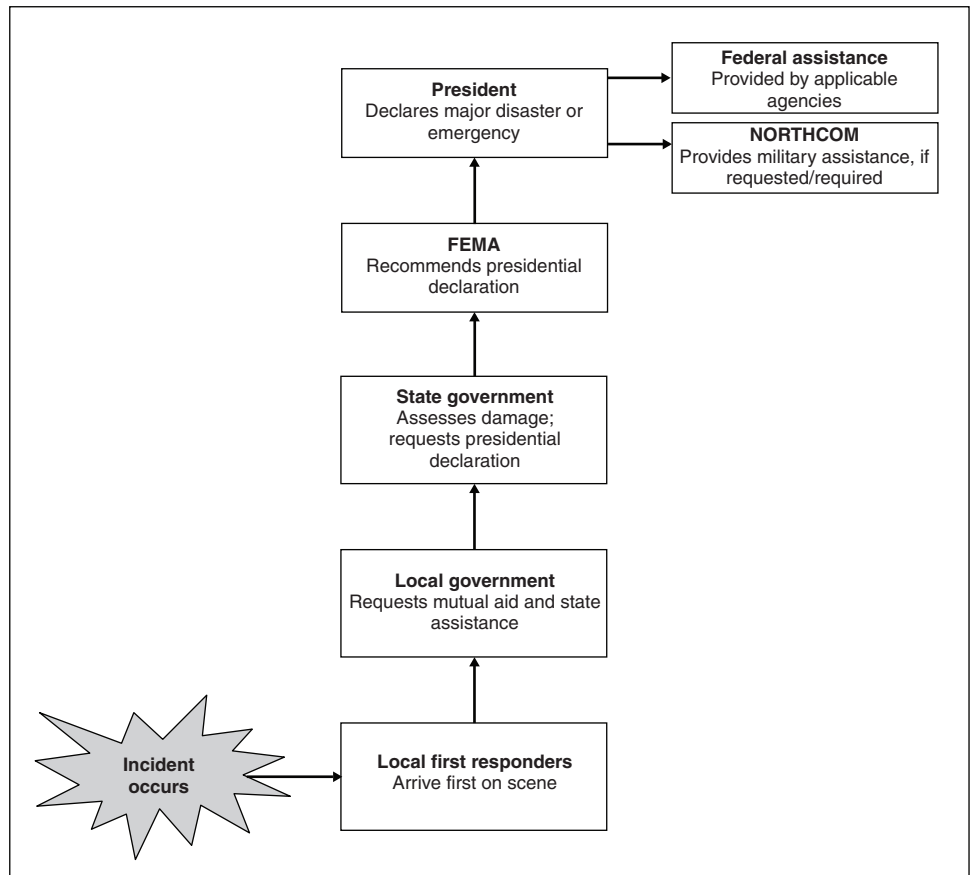
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(EMAC).<sup>26</sup> If an incident is beyond the community and state capabilities, the governor can seek federal assistance. The federal government has a wide array of capabilities and resources that can be made available to assist state and local agencies to respond to incidents.

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<sup>26</sup> EMAC is a mutual aid agreement among member states and is administered by the National Emergency Management Association. States affected by disasters have increasingly relied on EMAC as a means to access resources from other states, including emergency managers, National Guard assets, and first responders. GAO, *Emergency Management Assistance Compact: Enhancing EMAC's Collaborative and Administrative Capacity Should Improve National Disaster Response*, [GAO-07-854](#) (Washington, D.C.: June 29, 2007).

**Figure 3: Defense Support of Civil Authorities Response**



Source: GAO.

Overall coordination of federal incident management activities, other than those conducted for homeland defense, is generally the responsibility of DHS. Within DHS and as an executive agent for the National Preparedness System,<sup>27</sup> FEMA is responsible for coordinating and integrating the preparedness of federal, state, local, tribal, and nongovernmental entities.

<sup>27</sup>The National Preparedness System (NPS) provides a tool to assist jurisdictions, agencies, and organizations at all levels to plan for, assess, and track capabilities in a shared environment. It integrates various efforts to provide the comprehensive picture of preparedness and progress toward achieving the goal.

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In accordance with the *National Response Framework*<sup>28</sup> and applicable laws including the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (Stafford Act),<sup>29</sup> various federal departments or agencies may play primary, coordinating, or supporting roles, based on their authorities and resources and the nature of the threat or incident. In some instances, national defense assets may be needed to assist FEMA or another agency in the national response to an incident. Defense resources are committed after approval by the Secretary of Defense or at the direction of the President. When deciding to commit defense resources, officials consider military readiness, appropriateness of the circumstances, and whether the response is in accordance with the law.<sup>30</sup> For example, the Posse Comitatus Act<sup>31</sup> allows military forces to provide civil support, but these forces generally cannot become directly involved in law enforcement.

When it is determined that defense assistance is appropriate and is requested by FEMA, NORTHCOM is responsible for leading DOD's response. In the same manner as is applicable to homeland defense, NORTHCOM generally operates through established joint task forces that are subordinate to the command. In most cases, support will be localized, limited, and specific. When the scope of the disaster is reduced to the point where the primary federal agency can again assume full control and management without military assistance, NORTHCOM will exit.

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<sup>28</sup>The *National Response Framework* is a guide to how the nation conducts all-hazards incident response. It is built upon flexible, scalable, and adaptable coordinating structures to align key roles and responsibilities across the nation, linking all levels of government and private sector businesses and non-governmental organizations. Department of Homeland Security, *National Response Framework*.

<sup>29</sup>The Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, Pub. L. No. 100-707, signed into law November 23, 1988, amended the Disaster Relief Act of 1974, Pub. L. No. 93-288. This act constitutes the statutory authority for most federal disaster response activities, especially as they pertain to FEMA and FEMA programs.

<sup>30</sup>Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Pub. 3-28, *Civil Support*, II-4, (Sept. 14, 2007).

<sup>31</sup>18 U.S.C. § 1385 (2007).

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## NORTHCOM's Planning for Homeland Defense and Support of Civil Authorities

In order to prepare for its homeland defense and civil support missions, NORTHCOM has developed plans based on various incident scenarios, including 14 of DHS's 15 national planning scenarios.<sup>32</sup> NORTHCOM develops contingency plans to outline its role in potential disaster situations. NORTHCOM currently develops strategic-level concept plans rather than more detailed operational plans, because the potential threats that it is planning for are varied and nonspecific, ranging from terrorist threats to hurricanes and wildfires.<sup>33</sup> NORTHCOM uses the adaptive planning process for developing its plans—that is, the joint capability to create and revise plans rapidly and systematically, as circumstances require. Interagency coordination is a key part of the plan development process in adaptive planning.

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## States' and NGB's Roles in Preparing for Homeland Defense and Civil Support

In each state, the National Guard plays a crucial role in preparing for both homeland defense and defense support of civil authorities, in its dual roles as a national reserve force for the Army and Air Force and as a state militia. As the only military force shared by the states and the federal government, the National Guard provides a natural and effective bridge to accomplish collaboration between NORTHCOM and key state partners. The National Guard's federal mission is to provide trained units available for active duty in the armed forces, in the time of war or national emergency, and at such times as national security may require. NORTHCOM is responsible for the planning, exercising, and command and control of the National Guard for its federal missions conducted under the command and control of the President within its area of responsibility.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>The federal interagency community developed 15 all-hazards planning scenarios—the national planning scenarios—for use in federal, state, and local homeland security preparedness activities. The scenarios are planning tools and are representative of the range of potential terrorist attacks and natural disasters and related impacts facing the United States, including nuclear detonation; biological, chemical, radiological, and explosive attacks; as well as a major hurricane or earthquake. NORTHCOM does not use the 15<sup>th</sup> scenario dealing with cyberattacks because this is in the area of responsibility of U.S. Strategic Command.

<sup>33</sup>Generally, a contingency plan does not contain a list of specific forces needed to carry out missions, or even specific mission tasks. Instead, tools such as standing execute orders match types of units on potential call for use to plans, but specific units usually are not identified. Recently approved national planning guidance may soon require DOD and other federal agencies to prepare more detailed plans. White House, *National Planning*, Homeland Security Presidential Directive 8 Annex 1 (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 2007).

<sup>34</sup>Department of Defense, *Strategy for Homeland Defense and Civil Support*, 8; Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Pub. 3-27, *Homeland Defense*, II-14-II-15, A-1-A-6, (Jul. 12, 2007); and Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Pub. 3-28, *Civil Support*, (Sep. 14, 2007), II-11-II-14.

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As a state militia, the National Guard of each state responds to state emergencies, including natural disasters, civil disturbances, and acts of terrorism, and provides support to law enforcement in the war on drugs under the command and control of the state governor. The governor commands the National Guard through the TAG, who heads the joint force headquarters of the state. According to NGB officials, the state's joint force headquarters' mission is to maintain trained and equipped National Guard forces and to provide expertise and situational awareness to facilitate the integration of federal and state activities.

NGB is a joint activity of DOD, with unique statutory, regulatory, and policy-based responsibilities and authorities, including serving as the official channel of communications between the Departments of the Army and the Air Force and the states on National Guard matters.<sup>35</sup> NGB administers DOD, Department of the Army, and Department of the Air Force policies, programs, and plans pertaining to National Guard matters and facilitates the integration of federal and state activities, including facilitating mutual support among the states. Although NGB does not command or control forces, it assists the states in the organization, maintenance, and operation of their Army National Guard and Air National Guard units located in the states and coordinates the movement of nonfederalized National Guard forces.<sup>36</sup> NGB also maintains and provides information on National Guard matters affecting homeland defense and civil support to the Office of the Secretary of Defense; the combatant commands, including NORTHCOM; and others. During civil support missions, NGB provides policy guidance and facilitates National Guard assistance to the TAGs. Because of their interrelated missions, coordination between NORTHCOM and NGB is critical in planning for homeland defense and civil support.

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<sup>35</sup>This includes the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and U.S. possessions and territories.

<sup>36</sup>Army Regulation 130-5/AFMD 10, Organization and Functions of National Guard Bureau (Dec. 30, 2001).

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## NORTHCOM Has Ongoing Efforts to Improve Coordination with the States and NGB in Planning for Its Missions

In analyzing the survey results as well as during meetings with NORTHCOM and NGB officials, we found that NORTHCOM has ongoing efforts to improve coordination with the states and NGB in planning for its missions and responding to requests for civil support missions. As part of NORTHCOM's strategic vision, its goal is to facilitate the synchronization of national, state, and local assets and capabilities to defend the nation and support civilian authorities.<sup>37</sup> We found six areas in which NORTHCOM has ongoing efforts to improve coordination with the states and NGB, ranging from including states in its exercises to a new state engagement strategy for reaching out directly to state leaders. Some of these efforts are intended to help NORTHCOM plan for both of its missions, while others are intended to improve how it responds to requests for civil support.

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## States' Participation in NORTHCOM's Exercises Enhances Coordination

NORTHCOM conducts or participates in training exercises to improve planning for its missions and responses to requests for civil support. The command conducts two large-scale exercises—Ardent Sentry and Vigilant Shield—and participates in over 30 smaller regional, state, and local exercises annually to help potential responders prepare for man-made and natural disasters. Ardent Sentry and Vigilant Shield alternate between emphasizing the homeland defense mission and the civil support mission. Each training event exercises one of the key missions while at the same time including elements of the other. Practicing and training for emergency responses together not only helps to identify problem areas or lessons learned, but also helps state responders to build relationships with NORTHCOM and improve coordination. One TAG told us that he did not have any communications with NORTHCOM prior to his state's participation in Ardent Sentry, but has since developed a close working relationship with NORTHCOM officials. Table 1 shows the percentage of states participating in Ardent Sentry, Vigilant Shield, or other events, according to our survey of TAGs.

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<sup>37</sup>U.S. Northern Command, *Concept of Operations*, 3-11.

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**Table 1: State Participation in NORTHCOM Exercises**

Exercise	States participating
Ardent Sentry	24 (49%)
Vigilant Shield	12 (25%)
Other <sup>a</sup>	16 (32%)

Source: GAO TAG survey responses.

Note: Forty-nine TAGs responded to the Ardent Sentry question, 48 TAGs responded to the Vigilant Shield question, and all 50 responded to the question regarding “Other” exercises.

<sup>a</sup>Other includes field exercises, state-led exercises, and other federal exercises that involved NORTHCOM participation.

NORTHCOM’s Training and Exercise Directorate continues to work with state and National Guard entities to plan and conduct exercises and to develop a robust Vigilant Guard regional exercise program.

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## Including NGB in the Development of NORTHCOM’s Plans Provides National Guard Perspective

NORTHCOM has been informally including NGB in reviewing its plans, in the early stages, during concept development workshops, and during final coordination. NGB officials told us that regularly scheduled conferences between the planning directorates at NORTHCOM and NGB have greatly enhanced coordination over the past few months. In addition, NGB officials confirmed that NORTHCOM has been routinely providing its draft plans to them for comment/review to get the National Guard’s perspectives. This review process will be formalized in the next few months, when NGB becomes an officially recognized member of the Joint Planning and Execution Community (JPEC).<sup>38</sup> JPEC coordinates DOD efforts and ensures unity in the planning and execution of joint operations, and includes the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the services, the combatant commands and their component commands, sub-unified commands, joint task forces, and defense agencies.

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<sup>38</sup>The Chief of NGB initiated the inclusion of NGB as part of JPEC via a letter to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

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## Participation of TAGs and Their Staffs in Joint Force Orientation Program Provides Information on NORTHCOM's Supporting Role to the States

NORTHCOM has also established a Joint Force Orientation Program to improve the states' knowledge on NORTHCOM's role in response to requests for civil support. Several TAGs reported that their and their staffs' involvement in this program enhanced coordination with NORTHCOM. The primary objectives of this program are to facilitate a mutual understanding of joint operational concepts and information sharing between NORTHCOM and the states to help clarify NORTHCOM's supporting role to the states and to improve overall coordination. At the time of our audit, the Joint Force Orientation Program was organized into three phases.<sup>39</sup> The first phase included an overall command briefing and individual briefings from each NORTHCOM directorate, including discussions about NORTHCOM's training and exercise programs. The second phase of the Joint Force Orientation Program discussed more in-depth information about NORTHCOM, NGB, and the Joint Forces Command. This phase generally covers warfighter doctrine and operational application, including joint concepts and terminology, joint operational environment, command relationships, joint planning, and joint logistics. The third phase of the program is designed to be state specific, where the process for requesting federal assistance is reviewed and issues—such as intelligence sharing and oversight, mobile communications, planning, and logistics—are discussed in more detail. NORTHCOM provided us with the most recent participation data, and we found that all of the states within NORTHCOM's area of responsibility have received the first phase of Joint Force Orientation Program training, 46 states have received phase 2 training, and 19 states have received phase 3 training.<sup>40</sup> NORTHCOM told us that it is working toward providing phase 3 training to the remaining states. The willingness of the TAGs to participate and send their staffs to this training shows how useful the information exchanged and relationships developed with NORTHCOM during the training are to them.

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<sup>39</sup>NORTHCOM merged the first two phases of the Joint Force Orientation Program in September 2007, so there are currently only two phases of this program. NORTHCOM's goal in merging these phases and scheduling the program over weekends is to save state officials travel and training expenses and enable guardsmen to take fewer days off from their civilian jobs.

<sup>40</sup>This updates the information we obtained in our survey on the numbers of TAGs and their staff who have completed this training (44 TAGs reported that they or their staff had participated in the Joint Force Orientation Program). See app. I. The survey did not break out the data by training phases.



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## Hurricane and Wildfire Conferences Are Beginning to Build Effective Relationships between Participating Officials

Other ongoing efforts include NORTHCOM's weekly teleconferences throughout the hurricane season to coordinate with local, state, and federal partners and discuss potential storms; available resources, including EMAC;<sup>41</sup> and potential needs or unique capabilities that DOD may be asked to provide. For instance, if a hurricane is projected to affect the mid-Atlantic states, officials in those states may inquire about resources potentially needed—such as helicopters, trucks, or other equipment—in advance of the incident, thereby helping affected states to more effectively plan their responses. Similarly, NORTHCOM monitors wildfire activity and sets up teleconferences with the National Interagency Fire Center—which includes state emergency response officials—if it appears NORTHCOM may need to assist in fighting the fires. As a result of this frequent interaction, NORTHCOM has begun to build more productive and effective relationships with the participating states and agencies.

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## Locating Defense Coordinating Officers in the FEMA Regional Offices Improves NORTHCOM's Relationship with State and Local Officials

As part of the lessons learned from Hurricane Katrina, NORTHCOM has placed a defense coordinating officer (DCO) in each of FEMA's 10 regional offices and placed greater emphasis on the DCOs' mission (see fig. 4).<sup>42</sup> DCOs are senior-level military officers with joint experience and training on the *National Response Framework*, defense support to civil authorities, and DHS's National Incident Management System.<sup>43</sup> They are responsible for assisting civil authorities when requested by FEMA, providing liaison support and requirements validation, and serving as single points of contact for state, local, and other federal authorities that need DOD support. DCOs work closely with federal, state, and local officials to determine what unique DOD capabilities can be used to assist

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<sup>41</sup>EMAC provides a means for states affected by disasters to access resources from other states, including emergency managers, National Guard assets, and first responders. In a major disaster requiring assistance from multiple states, EMAC will be a principal avenue for requesting resources. [GAO-07-854](#).

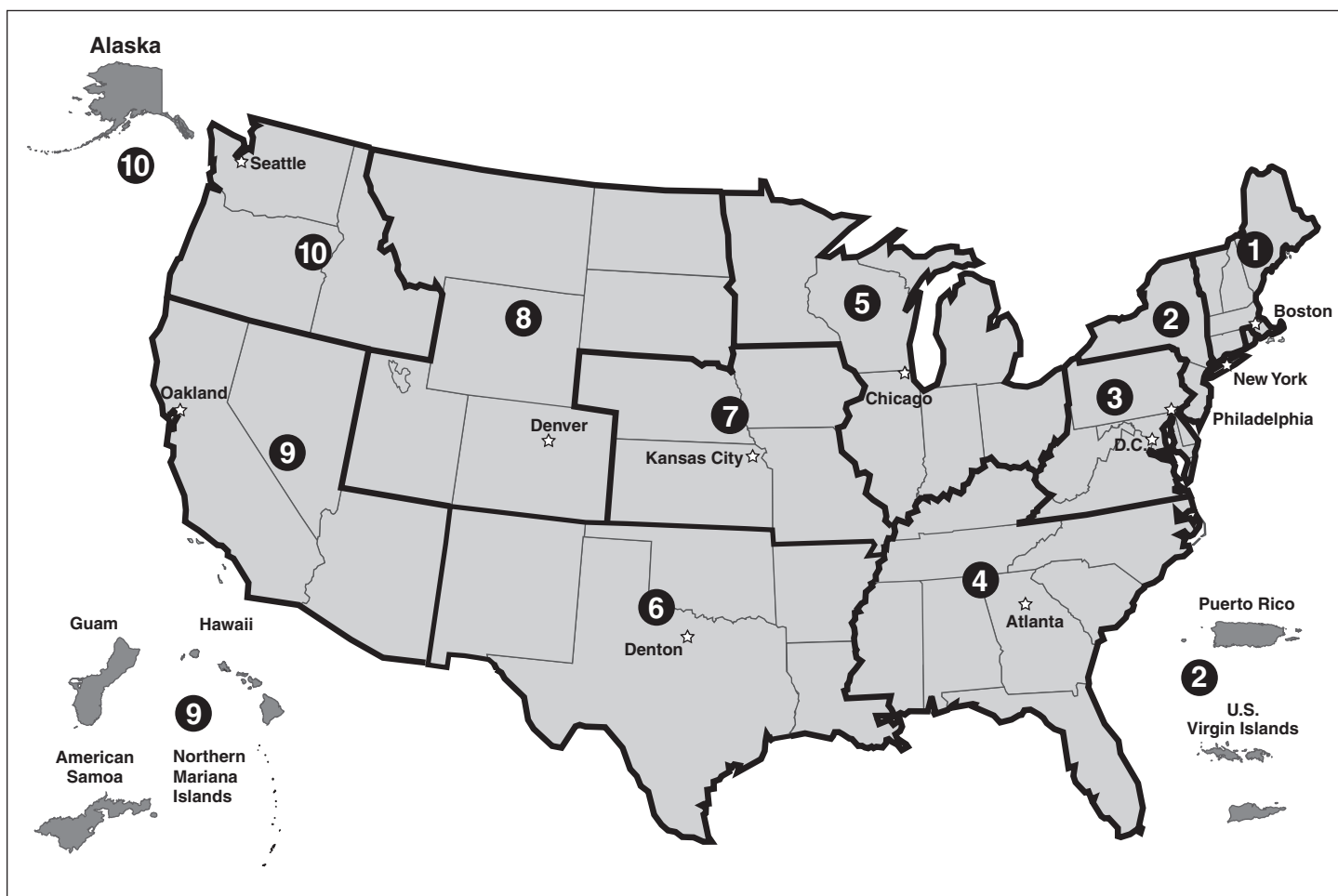
<sup>42</sup>Prior to October 1, 2006, training support brigade commanders of the First and Fifth Continental U.S. Armies also served as DCOs whenever requested by FEMA or another federal agency. Upon establishment of Fifth U.S. Army as the Army component to NORTHCOM, 10 full-time regional DCOs were established and located in the FEMA regional offices.

<sup>43</sup>The National Incident Management System provides a consistent nationwide template to enable all government, private sector, and nongovernmental organizations to work together to better respond to natural disasters and emergencies, including acts of terrorism. This system offers a unified approach to incidents and emphasizes standard command structures, preparedness, mutual aid, and resource management. Training for this system is administered by FEMA's Emergency Management Institute.

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in mitigating the effects of a natural or man-made disaster. According to TAGs, FEMA, and NORTHCOM officials, placing DCOs in all of the FEMA regional offices and emphasizing the DCOs' mission has improved NORTHCOM's relationships and coordination with state and local officials, as well as with FEMA in day-to-day planning and when an incident occurs. For example, in response to FEMA's request during the California wildfires in October 2007, NORTHCOM's subordinate command, Army Forces North, deployed the Region 9 DCO to support the Joint Field Office in Pasadena, California and assess and coordinate defense support of civil authorities with FEMA. Based on the requirements identified by state and federal officials in consultation with the DCO, DOD and the National Guard deployed six aircraft equipped with the Modular Air Firefighting System to California to assist in fighting wildfires.

Figure 4: FEMA Regions



Sources: FEMA; Map Resources (maps).

## NORTHCOM's New State Engagement Strategy Is Intended to Build Relationships with States

While NORTHCOM relies on NGB as its channel of communications for National Guard matters, NORTHCOM's commander believes that developing relationships directly with states will contribute to success in saving lives, protecting infrastructure, and promoting a resilient society. NORTHCOM is currently developing a state engagement strategy to build relationships with appropriate state leadership, including governors, TAGs, state homeland security advisors, and emergency managers of major metropolitan areas. As part of this strategy, NORTHCOM's Commander has personally met with several state governors and TAGs to discuss NORTHCOM's roles and missions and determine how they can

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coordinate when responding to an incident. For example, the Commander met with TAGs from the northeast region in November 2007 to discuss both military coordination and interagency coordination for regional domestic operations. The draft strategy also recognizes the importance of NORTHCOM working with the states in close coordination with the organizations such as NGB and DHS/FEMA, which are responsible for coordinating with the states regarding federal matters related to incident management. NGB officials told us that working with the states will provide NORTHCOM with a greater appreciation for the role and authority of the governor and sensitivity to the sovereignty and rights of states. While the strategy is designed to build the relationships needed for national planning and execution, it does not include established and thorough processes for involving states in the development of NORTHCOM's plans, obtaining state emergency response plans, or facilitating integrated intergovernmental planning.

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## Gaps Remain in NORTHCOM's Coordination with the States and NGB

We identified three areas in which there are gaps in coordination with the states and NGB. First, NORTHCOM officials involve the states minimally in the development of NORTHCOM's major homeland defense and civil support plans, and they are not required to do so. Second, NORTHCOM generally was not familiar with state emergency response plans and capabilities and has no established and thorough process for gaining access to this information. Third, a 2005 memorandum of agreement, which is intended to provide the procedures by which NORTHCOM and NGB interact, does not clearly define each agency's roles and responsibilities for planning for homeland defense and civil support. Improvements in these areas may help to effectively align NORTHCOM's efforts with other national efforts, as required by the new annex to Homeland Security Presidential Directive 8 on national planning;<sup>44</sup> help NORTHCOM to manage its overall risk; and better ensure that it will be able to fully respond when called upon to perform either of its missions.

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## NORTHCOM Only Minimally Involves States in Planning

Although the majority of TAGs are familiar to varying degrees with NORTHCOM's homeland defense and defense support to civil authorities plans (see table 2), in our survey less than 25 percent reported that they were involved in developing and reviewing these plans (see table 3). NORTHCOM is not required by DOD specifically to involve states in the

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<sup>44</sup>White House, *National Planning*.

development and review of its homeland defense and support of civil authorities plans. However, its strategic vision set forth in its *Concept of Operations* and the recent annex to Homeland Security Presidential Directive 8 emphasize that plans and capabilities should be synchronized at the national, state, and local levels.<sup>45</sup> According to several TAGs, NORTHCOM should coordinate more with state and local organizations, particularly with the National Guard, to develop a good planning and operational relationship and to enhance the ability of all organizations to plan and respond rapidly in a crisis. We previously reported on the need to include state and local jurisdictions in the development of response plans because they are key stakeholders and would be on the front lines if an incident occurs.<sup>46</sup>

Table 2: TAG Familiarity with NORTHCOM's Plans

Question	Very familiar	Somewhat familiar	Slightly familiar	Not at all
How familiar are you with NORTHCOM's homeland defense plan?	10 (20%)	27 (55%)	9 (18%)	3 (6%)
How familiar are you with NORTHCOM's defense support of civil authorities plan?	12 (24%)	20 (41%)	12 (24%)	5 (10%)

Source: GAO analysis of TAG survey responses.

Table 3: TAG Involvement in NORTHCOM's Plan Development

Plan	Planning process	Yes	No
Homeland defense	Attend meetings	7 (14%)	43 (86%)
	Comment on draft	12 (24%)	38 (76%)
	Comment on final	7 (14%)	43 (86%)
Defense support of civil authorities	Attend meetings	7 (14%)	43 (86%)
	Comment on draft	12 (24%)	38 (76%)
	Comment on final	9 (18%)	41 (82%)

Source: GAO analysis of TAG survey responses.

<sup>45</sup>U.S. Northern Command, *Concept of Operations*; White House, Homeland Security Presidential Directive 8, *National Preparedness* (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 17, 2003); and White House, *National Planning*.

<sup>46</sup>GAO, *Influenza Pandemic: Opportunities Exist to Clarify Federal Leadership Roles and Improve Pandemic Planning*, [GAO-07-1257T](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 26, 2007).

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In the case of homeland defense, NORTHCOM planners told us that, as the official channel of communication for National Guard related matters, NGB provides the states' perspectives when commenting on NORTHCOM's plans. The planners also said that further state involvement in the development of NORTHCOM's plan is not required because (1) this is a strategic-level concept plan<sup>47</sup> that does not require such detail and (2) NORTHCOM is the lead during a homeland defense incident. NGB officials told us that as requested in NORTHCOM homeland defense plan, they have collected and reviewed states' supporting homeland defense plans and, to the extent possible, have attempted to represent these perspectives when commenting on NORTHCOM's homeland defense plan.<sup>48</sup> However, an NGB planning official told us that the states have differing perspectives, and NORTHCOM could better learn about these differences by reviewing the individual state plans. In addition, while NGB provides information of National Guard capabilities, the states may have other capabilities and requirements that NORTHCOM should be aware of. By only relying on NGB, NORTHCOM may not be able to maintain awareness of the environment in which the command may be operating, including critical infrastructure locations relevant to its operations, which is important to fully carrying out its homeland defense mission.

In the case of civil support and as outlined in the *National Response Framework*, because NORTHCOM plays a supporting role to other federal agencies and subsequently to state and local governments, NORTHCOM officials told us that they are starting to reach out directly to states to obtain their perspectives and incorporate these into future revisions of NORTHCOM's defense support of civil authorities plan. In order to effectively develop a civil support plan, NORTHCOM needs to know what its requirements may be. DOD recognizes that these requirements are driven both by the capabilities gaps of the primary federal agencies and those of the state and local governments.<sup>49</sup> In either homeland defense or

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<sup>47</sup>Because NORTHCOM's plans are broader concept plans rather than more detailed operational plans, they are not focused on specific scenarios and discrete sets of required capabilities needed to accomplish objectives.

<sup>48</sup>NORTHCOM's homeland defense concept plan specifically requested that NGB facilitate the states in providing supporting plans and forward these to NORTHCOM. NGB received no indication that these plans had been reviewed, and NORTHCOM officials were not clear about the status and completeness of these supporting plans.

<sup>49</sup>As we reported separately, NORTHCOM has taken actions to improve the coordination of its homeland defense and civil support plans and operations with other federal agencies. However, NORTHCOM lacks formal guidance to coordinate its planning effort with its agency partners. [GAO-08-251](#).

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civil support, increasing the current level of state involvement in the development of NORTHCOM's plans could help integrate intergovernmental planning for catastrophic incidents, enhance overall coordination, and help ensure that NORTHCOM's plans for its missions and responses to incidents are as effective as possible.<sup>50</sup>

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### **NORTHCOM Lacks Familiarity with State Emergency Response Plans and May Not Be Aware of Capabilities and Potential Gaps**

We found that NORTHCOM generally was not familiar with state emergency response plans and has not obtained detailed information on states' plans and capabilities to determine the specific challenges it may face in conducting homeland defense or civil support operations. According to our survey, 54 percent of the TAGs believe that NORTHCOM is not at all or only slightly familiar with their states' plan (see table 4). In written comments in our survey, several TAGs reported that NORTHCOM should be more familiar with state emergency response plans, and should determine how best to support the states' plans and, where appropriate, incorporate these plans to ensure a unified effort. Developing a synchronized and coordinated planning capability at all levels of government is important for a coordinated national response to domestic incidents.<sup>51</sup> In part, NORTHCOM is not more familiar with these plans because it has no established and thorough process regarding coordination with the states or for gaining access to emergency response plans, and it is not specifically required by DOD to obtain information on state emergency response plans or determine state and local capabilities and potential resource gaps.<sup>52</sup> NORTHCOM planners told us that they do not need access to state emergency response plans because they are doing strategic-level concept plans and this level of detail would be more appropriate for tactical level planning, such as planning done by

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<sup>50</sup>Catastrophic incidents by their nature cut across geographic and political boundaries, and these events require fully integrated intergovernmental actions. Department of Homeland Security, *Nationwide Plan Review: Phase 2 Report*.

<sup>51</sup>The annex to the 2003 National Preparedness Homeland Security Presidential Directive, issued in December 2007, establishes a comprehensive approach to national planning for homeland security and requires that the federal government more closely integrate federal, state, local, and tribal plans with respect to capability assessments. White House, *National Planning*, 4.

<sup>52</sup>DHS has compiled and reviewed the state emergency response plans. Department of Homeland Security, *Nationwide Plan Review: Phase 2 Report*.

NORTHCOM's subordinate commands, like Army Forces North.<sup>53</sup> However, NGB and FEMA officials told us that one of NORTHCOM's biggest challenges is its current inability to anticipate the capabilities and requirements of state and local governments during a civil support incident because of the lack of advanced planning and coordination between NORTHCOM, states, and local governments. Furthermore, NORTHCOM officials told us that the complexity of the planning involved for a large-scale disaster is such that even if states can adequately plan for the resources they will need, they do not always have adequate multistate plans to integrate the state, local, federal, and nongovernmental responses. By not obtaining and using information on state plans and capabilities, NORTHCOM increases the risk that it will not be adequately prepared to respond to an incident with the needed resources, including the types, numbers, and timing of capabilities (trained personnel and equipment).

**Table 4: NORTHCOM's Familiarity with State Emergency Response Plans**

Question	Very familiar	Somewhat familiar	Slightly familiar	Not at all
How familiar, if at all, do you think NORTHCOM is with your state's Homeland Security/Emergency Operations Plan?	1 (4%)	11 (42%)	12 (46%)	2 (8%)

Source: GAO analysis of TAG survey responses.

Note: TAGs were asked to respond to this question if they had provided NORTHCOM with a copy of the state's Homeland Security/Emergency Operations Plan, and 26 TAGs responded.

One of NORTHCOM's subordinate commands, JTF-CS,<sup>54</sup> has been collecting state emergency response plans so that if called upon to provide assistance in a chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, or high-yield explosive (CBRNE) incident, its Commander will have as much advance information as possible regarding state plans, resources, and potential

<sup>53</sup>NORTHCOM has difficulty identifying requirements for capabilities it may need in part because DOD has required NORTHCOM to complete concept plans, which are more general plans that do not entail the assignment of specific forces. [GAO-08-251](#). Recently approved national planning guidance requires DOD and other federal agencies to prepare more detailed plans. White House, *National Planning*.

<sup>54</sup>JTF-CS is a subordinate command to NORTHCOM and is responsible for planning and integrating DOD support to states or other federal agencies following a CBRNE incident. JTF-CS facilitates the development of capability-based force packages and modules to meet various CBRNE incident management options. When directed by NORTHCOM to respond to an incident, JTF-CS will arrive on site to gain situational awareness and report back to NORTHCOM for preparation of an estimate of what is needed from DOD. JTF-CS was performing this mission 3 years prior to NORTHCOM being established in 2002.



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areas where assistance may be required. JTF-CS found that some state and local governments are reluctant to share their plans because they fear that DOD will “grade” their plans or that potential capability gaps will be made public, with an accompanying political cost. A NORTHCOM official told us that there will always be some tension between the states and DOD and other federal agencies as a result of the nation’s constitutional structure. JTF-CS is therefore extremely careful about how it shares its emergency plan analyses and has made progress in gaining access to these plans through DHS.

DHS has collected and assessed state emergency response plans as part of a nationwide plan review to determine the status of catastrophic planning for states and 75 of the nation’s largest urban areas.<sup>55</sup> Participation in the review was a prerequisite for receipt of fiscal year 2006 DHS homeland security grant funds. The review concluded that no individual plan or resource base can fully absorb and respond to a catastrophe and that unsystematic planning and the absence of an integrated planning system is a national operational vulnerability. The annex to Homeland Security Presidential Directive 8, issued in December 2007, directs the establishment of a comprehensive approach to national planning through an integrated planning system.<sup>56</sup> This system is to include, among other things, a description of the process that (1) links regional, state, local, and tribal plans, planning cycles, and processes and allows these plans to inform the development of federal plans and (2) fosters the integration of such plans and allows for state, local, and tribal capability assessments to feed into federal plans. DHS may, therefore, be one source from which NORTHCOM could obtain information on state emergency response plans and capabilities.

Given its relationship with the states, NGB could also be a conduit for NORTHCOM to share its plans with states and obtain information on states plans and capabilities. In addition, NGB officials suggested that emergency preparedness liaison officers (EPLO) could be a potential conduit for NORTHCOM and states to share plans. EPLOs are senior reserve officers from the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps who represent the federal military in each state and in each of the 10 FEMA regional offices. EPLOs coordinate the provision of military personnel,

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<sup>55</sup>Department of Homeland Security, *Nationwide Plan Review Phase 1 Report* (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 10, 2006), and *Nationwide Plan Review Phase 2 Report*.

<sup>56</sup>White House, *National Planning*.

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equipment, and supplies to support the emergency relief and cleanup efforts of civil authorities. According to NGB officials, expanding the EPLO program to include sharing plans with states would provide a closer link between NORTHCOM and the states without the sensitivity of state sovereignty issues. The DCOs who are also located in FEMA's 10 regional offices could potentially serve as NORTHCOM's points of contact for the EPLOs.

NORTHCOM has taken actions to improve the coordination of its homeland defense and civil support plans and operations with federal agencies.<sup>57</sup> However, in its role either in support of other federal agencies or as the primary agency in homeland defense incidents, NORTHCOM does not have adequate information on states' plans and capabilities. By minimally involving the states in its homeland defense and civil support plans and not becoming familiar with information on states' emergency response plans and capabilities, NORTHCOM increases the risk that it may not be prepared with the needed resources to respond to an incident. These gaps may be attributable in part to the fact that NORTHCOM does not have an established and thorough process for cooperating and interacting with the states. One model of such a process is NORTHCOM's security cooperation plans with Canada and Mexico, since the states are each separate governments within the federal system.<sup>58</sup> For example, NORTHCOM's cooperation plan with Canada and Mexico outlines a strategy for planning, assessing, and executing security objectives and other strategic priorities. These objectives include advancing common interests, reducing impediments to cooperation, encouraging improved capabilities and willingness to operate in coalition, and improving combined homeland defense capabilities. Without a similar kind of cooperation plan for the states within its area of responsibility, NORTHCOM cannot optimally involve the TAGs and other state or local officials in its planning activities and develop a process for obtaining and using information on state emergency plans and capabilities. Moreover, without such a cooperation plan, NORTHCOM is not likely to reduce confusion, facilitate effective planning, and facilitate effective and efficient responses to incidents.

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<sup>57</sup>GAO-08-251.

<sup>58</sup>DOD requires combatant commanders to have security cooperation plans with foreign governments. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Pub. 5-0, *Joint Operation Planning* (Dec. 26, 2006), I-3, I-4, GL-21.

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## NORTHCOM and NGB Responsibilities for Homeland Defense and Civil Support Are Not Clearly Defined

DHS's *National Response Framework* and NORTHCOM's *Concept of Operations* both emphasize that NORTHCOM should coordinate with federal, state, and local partners before, during, and after an incident.<sup>59</sup> Coordination with NGB is particularly important, because NGB has experience working with state and local authorities during incidents and it functions as NORTHCOM's formal link to the states. We previously reported that as with preparing for and responding to any type of disaster, leadership roles and responsibilities must be clearly defined, effectively communicated, and well understood to facilitate rapid and effective decision making. Furthermore, we reported that without clearly defined roles and responsibilities, the potential remains for confusion and gaps or duplication by the combatant commands relative to other agencies.<sup>60</sup> The *National Strategy for Homeland Security* also emphasizes that a lack of clarity regarding roles and responsibilities across all levels of government can lead to gaps in the national response and delay the ability to provide life-saving support when needed.<sup>61</sup>

In July 2005, NORTHCOM and NGB signed a memorandum of agreement outlining their command and coordination relationship. This memorandum, which is intended to provide the procedures by which the two entities interact, broadly establishes that NORTHCOM and NGB "will coordinate on policy, program and planning actions related to missions and requirements affecting the National Guard." The memorandum further provides for the location of a small NGB office at NORTHCOM to advise NORTHCOM's Commander regarding National Guard-related issues.<sup>62</sup> The mission of this office is to advise and assist NORTHCOM's Commander on all matters involving the National Guard, provide a conduit to NGB leaders and staff, and promote integration of National Guard priorities and capabilities into NORTHCOM's plans and operations. The staff members of

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<sup>59</sup>Department of Homeland Security, *National Response Framework*, and U.S. Northern Command, *Concept of Operations*.

<sup>60</sup>GAO, *Influenza Pandemic: DOD Combatant Commands' Preparedness Efforts Could Benefit from More Clearly Defined Roles, Resources, and Risk Mitigation*, [GAO-07-696](#) (Washington, D.C.: June 20, 2007); *Homeland Security: Preparing for and Responding to Disasters*, [GAO-07-395T](#) (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 9, 2007); and *Emergency Preparedness and Response: Some Issues and Challenges Associated with Major Emergency Incidents*, [GAO-06-467T](#) (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 23, 2006).

<sup>61</sup>Homeland Security council, *National Strategy for Homeland Security*, 32.

<sup>62</sup>The memorandum limits the staff in the NGB liaison office to eight; there are currently four staff assigned to the office.

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this office provide input to numerous requests for information from NORTHCOM. This office is not intended to serve as the only point of coordination between NORTHCOM and NGB. Officials told us that there is no formal process in place for the NORTHCOM National Guard Office to coordinate with NGB headquarters. Such a process could improve coordination between the NGB liaison office and NGB headquarters.

Our analysis of the memorandum, NORTHCOM's *Concept of Operations*, the regulation describing the organization and function of NGB, and other documents showed that there is no detailed guidance on NORTHCOM's and NGB's roles and responsibilities for homeland defense and defense support of civil authorities. Clearly defined responsibilities help to ensure unity of effort, prevent duplication, and enable efficient use of resources. As a result of the lack of clearly defined roles and responsibilities between NORTHCOM and NGB, we found several instances in which there was confusion and duplicate or potentially wasted efforts. For example, some TAGs survey responses indicated that because responsibilities are not clearly defined, both NGB and NORTHCOM are requesting the same information during an incident. In addition, NORTHCOM's homeland defense plan required NGB to collect state homeland defense plans and make them available to NORTHCOM. NGB compiled and reviewed these plans from the states and territories within NORTHCOM's area of responsibility and made them available to NORTHCOM on its Web portal. However, NORTHCOM planning officials told us that they did not request that NGB compile these plans and that, in fact, they do not have a need for state supporting plans because such plans will not affect how NORTHCOM's strategic-level homeland defense concept plan is written. Nevertheless, NGB spent resources collecting information that has not been used by NORTHCOM. As discussed above, we believe NORTHCOM officials should be reviewing these plans to ensure that they have sufficient awareness of the environment in which they may be operating to fully carry out the command's homeland defense mission.

In addition, we found that NGB has developed a Joint Capabilities Database that includes all National Guard capabilities and has made this database available for NORTHCOM's use. However, NORTHCOM officials told us that rather than use the database, they prefer to rely on NGB staff to provide them National Guard readiness and capabilities data. NGB officials also told us that they have not encouraged NORTHCOM to use the database thus far because they are still finalizing the procedure for maintaining and updating the database with information from all states and territories. The officials said that they expect to have these issues worked out within the next few months in advance of the hurricane

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season and to begin to encourage NORTHCOM to make use of the database. NGB's goal with the database is to provide a national look at the National Guard's capabilities.

Without clearly defined lines of coordination and roles and responsibility, federal efforts may not be used in the most effective and efficient manner. This is increasingly important as DOD is currently developing a database of federal emergency response capabilities, including those for active and reserve DOD units and National Guard capabilities in each state,<sup>63</sup> and FEMA is currently developing a list of organizations and functions within DOD that may be used to provide support to civil authorities during natural or man-made disasters.<sup>64</sup> Coordinating all of these efforts will be critical to ensuring the efficient use of federal resources as well as to reduce the risk of potential capabilities gaps.

An NGB official told us that NORTHCOM and NGB have not revised the 2005 memorandum of agreement to more clearly define their responsibilities because they were waiting for the National Guard Empowerment Act,<sup>65</sup> which was partially incorporated into the National Defense Authorization Act for 2008,<sup>66</sup> to be signed into law and, subsequently, for a new NGB charter to be developed and issued by the Secretary of Defense.<sup>67</sup> The National Guard Empowerment Act includes provisions that may enhance the level of coordination between NORTHCOM and NGB. For example, the Secretary of Defense is required to prepare a plan coordinating the use of the National Guard and members of the armed forces on active duty when responding to an incident and include protocols for DOD, NGB, and the governors of the states to carry out operations in coordination with one another.<sup>68</sup> An NGB official told us that the process of preparing this plan will require more coordination between NORTHCOM and NGB. More important, NGB's charter, which is currently undergoing revision based on the new act, potentially could resolve a number of ambiguities by more clearly defining the roles and

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<sup>63</sup>Pub. L. No. 109-364, § 1406 (2006).

<sup>64</sup>Pub. L. No. 109-295 § 651 (2006).

<sup>65</sup>Pub. L. No. 110-181, § 1801 (2008).

<sup>66</sup>Pub. L. No. 110-181, §§ 1811-1813 (2008).

<sup>67</sup>This act was passed in January 2008, and NGB's charter is currently being revised.

<sup>68</sup>Pub. L. No. 110-181, § 1814 (2008).

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responsibilities of NGB and its relationships with other agencies, such as NORTHCOM. Further, the NGB official told us that the revised charter will greatly simplify negotiations of a revised memorandum between the two agencies. Without clearly defined responsibilities for NORTHCOM and NGB, there is the potential for a lack of effective coordination between the two agencies and duplicative or wasted efforts. Clearly identifying roles and responsibilities is increasingly important because responding to a major disaster in the United States—natural or man-made—is a shared responsibility of many agencies across all levels of government and cannot be effectively accomplished by one agency.<sup>69</sup> Without effective interagency coordination and planning and clearly defined roles and responsibilities, there is a risk that NORTHCOM's, NGB's, and other nationwide efforts to respond to an incident may be fragmented and uncoordinated, such as in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.<sup>70</sup>

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## Conclusions

Within the federal government, there is an increasing realization that the nation needs to integrate not just the response to an incident, but also the plans of many entities at all the levels involved in responding to such incidents. This planning integration will help ensure that when the federal government responds, its response will be as effective as possible. NORTHCOM's recent efforts to coordinate with states and NGB have helped address some of the uncertainty in the homeland defense and civil support planning process and have improved NORTHCOM's ability to coordinate in the event of an actual incident. However, without an established and thorough process for requesting, obtaining, and using information on state emergency plans and capabilities—whether from coordination with DHS or NGB or from direct interaction with states—NORTHCOM may be missing opportunities to better plan its missions and manage its risk in a more informed manner. Moreover, NORTHCOM may not be fully prepared to support states, resulting in ineffective planning and fragmented, uncoordinated responses to incidents.

Given that NORTHCOM and NGB both have increasingly important responsibilities for homeland defense and defense support of civil

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<sup>69</sup>Homeland Security Council, *National Strategy for Homeland Security*.

<sup>70</sup>White House, *The Federal Response to Hurricane Katrina: Lessons Learned*; House of Representatives, *A Failure of Initiative: Final Report of the Select Bipartisan Committee to Investigate the Preparation for and Response to Hurricane Katrina*; U.S. Senate, *Hurricane Katrina: A Nation Still Unprepared*; and [GAO-06-808T](#).

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authorities, it is imperative that these entities work together to effectively prepare for DOD's response to an incident. Without fully and clearly defined responsibilities for NORTHCOM and NGB, confusion and duplicative or potentially wasted efforts may result, causing an inefficient use of DOD resources during a time of increased military operations and a growing fiscal imbalance. Further, without clear guidance on their responsibilities, the risk is increased that these agencies' responses to an incident may be ineffective and inefficient, potentially increasing response time and risking the safety of the U.S. population and infrastructure.

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## Recommendations for Executive Action

To improve NORTHCOM's coordination with the states, we recommend that the Secretary of Defense direct NORTHCOM to develop an established and thorough process to guide its coordination with the states, including provisions for

- involving the states in NORTHCOM's planning processes,
- obtaining information on state emergency response plans and capabilities, and
- using such information to improve the development and execution of its concept plans.

To improve NORTHCOM's coordination with NGB, we recommend that the Secretary of Defense direct NORTHCOM and NGB to revise the memorandum of agreement or develop an alternate document to include fully and clearly defined roles and responsibilities for NORTHCOM, NGB, and the NORTHCOM National Guard Office.

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## Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

In comments on a draft of this report, DOD generally agreed with the intent of our recommendations and discussed steps it is taking and planning to take to address the recommendations. DOD and FEMA also provided technical comments, which we have incorporated into the report where appropriate.

In response to our recommendation that NORTHCOM develop an established and thorough process to guide its coordination with the states, DOD agreed that such a process should be developed to guide the coordination between local, state, and federal governments. Homeland Security Presidential Directive 8, Annex 1 requires that DHS develop an integrated planning system consisting of a synchronized system of plans

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that integrates federal, state, and local operational capabilities to affect a coordinated national response. DOD told us that the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Homeland Defense and Americas' Security Affairs, the Joint Staff, NORTHCOM, and NGB are currently in coordination with DHS in developing the integrated planning system. We believe that developing this system would meet the intent of our recommendation if it provides NORTHCOM with an established and thorough process for requesting, obtaining, and using information on state emergency plans and capabilities and improves the development and execution of their concept plans, thereby helping NORTHCOM to manage its risk in a more informed manner.

DOD agreed with our recommendation that NORTHCOM and NGB revise their memorandum of agreement or develop an alternate document to include fully and clearly defined roles and responsibilities for NORTHCOM, NGB, and the NORTHCOM National Guard Office and stated that a revision to the memorandum is currently being coordinated. We believe that providing clear guidance on roles and responsibilities will help to ensure that these agencies' responses to an incident will be effective and efficient, potentially reducing response time and enhancing the safety of the U.S. population and infrastructure.

DOD's written comments are reprinted in appendix III.

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We are sending copies of this report to the Secretary of Defense and other interested parties. We will also make copies available to others on request. In addition, the report will be available at no charge on GAO's Web site at <http://www.gao.gov>.



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If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-5431 or [dagostinod@gao.gov](mailto:dagostinod@gao.gov). Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. Key contributors to this report are listed in appendix IV.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Davi M. D'Agostino". The signature is stylized with large, flowing loops and cursive lettering.

Davi M. D'Agostino  
Director, Defense Capabilities  
and Management

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*List of Requesters*

The Honorable Bennie G. Thompson  
Chairman  
Committee on Homeland Security  
House of Representatives

The Honorable Tom Davis  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform  
House of Representatives

The Honorable Christopher Shays  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs  
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform  
House of Representatives

The Honorable Kit Bond  
United States Senate

The Honorable Patrick Leahy  
United States Senate

The Honorable Gene Taylor  
House of Representatives

# Appendix I: Questionnaire and Survey Results



## United States Government Accountability Office Survey of State Adjutants General

The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) is an independent, non-partisan agency that assists Congress in evaluating federal programs. We are conducting an audit of U.S. Northern Command's (NORTHCOM) planning and preparedness for its homeland defense and defense support of civil authorities missions. As a part of this audit we are looking at NORTHCOM's sharing and coordination of plans with the states as well as its interagency coordination efforts in general.

We are conducting this survey to find out more about your experiences in working and communicating with NORTHCOM. Your responses will help us to make actionable recommendations, if needed, for furthering coordination and cooperation between NORTHCOM and the states.

Your responses may be presented in larger groupings for summary purposes and may be used individually as illustrative examples in our report. However, neither you nor your state will be expressly identified. If you have a question about the non-attribution of your answers please contact us.

Contact Information

1. Please enter the following information about the person completing this survey and with whom we can follow up, if needed:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Title: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Rank: \_\_\_\_\_  
 State: \_\_\_\_\_  
 FEMA Region: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Phone #: (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_-\_\_\_\_\_  
 E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Section 1: Homeland Defense Plan

2. How familiar are you with NORTHCOM's *Homeland Defense* plan?

20% very familiar  
 55% somewhat familiar  
 18% slightly familiar  
 6% not at all familiar

3. Were you or your staff involved in any of the following NORTHCOM activities related to the *Homeland Defense* plan?

	No	Yes
a) attending plan development meetings with NORTHCOM	86%	14%
b) providing comments on a draft version of NORTHCOM's plan	76%	24%
c) providing comments on the final version of NORTHCOM's plan	86%	14%
d) attending NORTHCOM meetings for your FEMA region	66%	34%

## Section 2: Defense Support of Civil Authorities Plan

4. How familiar are you with NORTHCOM's *Defense Support of Civil Authorities* plan?

- 24% very familiar  
 41% somewhat familiar  
 24% slightly familiar  
 10% not at all familiar

5. Were you or your staff involved in any of the following NORTHCOM activities related to the *Defense Support of Civil Authorities* plan?

	No	Yes
a) attending plan development meetings with NORTHCOM	86%	14%
b) providing comments on a draft version of NORTHCOM's plan	76%	24%
c) providing comments on the final version of NORTHCOM's plan	82%	18%
d) attending NORTHCOM meetings for your FEMA region	76%	24%

## Section 3: Exercises

## 6. Have officials in your state participated in the following NORTHCOM exercises? If so, in what year?

	No	Yes	Year(s)
a) Ardent Sentry	51%	49% →	
b) Vigilant Shield	75%	25% →	

## 7. Have officials in your state participated in any NORTHCOM exercises other than Ardent Sentry or Vigilant Shield?

- 32% Yes → Which exercises?  
 68% No

8. Has your state conducted homeland defense or emergency response exercises since September 11, 2001?

- 100% Yes → What exercises?  
 0 No → SKIP TO QUESTION #12

**9. Did you invite NORTHCOM officials to participate in your state exercises?**

50% Yes

50% No → SKIP TO QUESTION #12

**10. Did NORTHCOM officials participate in your state exercises?**

96% Yes

4% No → SKIP TO QUESTION #12

**11. In your opinion, did NORTHCOM send the appropriate staff to participate in your exercises?**

91% Yes

9% No → Please explain.

Section 4: NORTHCOM Overview

**12. Please describe your state's coordination and communication with NORTHCOM regarding planning and/or operations for homeland defense and defense support of civil authorities.**

**13. Does your state have a Homeland Security/ Emergency Operations Plan?**

100% Yes

0 No → SKIP TO QUESTION #16

**14. Did you or your staff provide and/or discuss your state Homeland Security/ Emergency Operations Plan with NORTHCOM?**

50% Yes

50% No → SKIP TO QUESTION #16

**15. How familiar, if at all, do you think NORTHCOM is with your state's Homeland Security/ Emergency Operations Plan?**

4% very familiar

42% somewhat familiar

46% slightly familiar

8% not at all familiar

**16. Please describe your expectation for NORTHCOM's involvement in the event of an incident in your state.**

**17. How would this expectation change, if at all, if the incident involved *federal military property* in your state?**

**18. Did you or your staff participate in NORTHCOM's Joint Force Orientation Program?**

88% Yes → Please explain your participation:

12% No

**19. From your perspective, what are the strengths of NORTHCOM's *current* coordination and communication with your state?**

**20. From your perspective, what are the weaknesses of NORTHCOM's *current* coordination and communication with your state?**

**21. What recommendations, if any, do you have for improving coordination and communication between NORTHCOM and your state?**

**22. What recommendations, if any, do you have for improving NORTHCOM's *Homeland Defense* plan?**

**23. What recommendations, if any, do you have for improving NORTHCOM's *Defense Support of Civil Authorities* plan?**

**24. Any additional comments?**

**Thank you for your time.**

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# Appendix II: Scope and Methodology

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In conducting this review, we focused our scope on U.S. Northern Command's (NORTHCOM) coordination with the states and the National Guard Bureau (NGB). We excluded NORTHCOM's coordination with other federal agencies and organizations and nongovernmental organizations because this is addressed in a companion report. Our review focused on NORTHCOM's coordination efforts occurring since Hurricane Katrina in 2005. In addressing our objectives, we interviewed and obtained information and related documents from officials at the following locations:

- NORTHCOM Headquarters, Peterson Air Force Base, Colorado Springs, Colorado
- Joint Forces Command, Norfolk, Virginia
- The Office of the Secretary of Defense, Washington, D.C.
- The Joint Staff, Washington, D.C.
- Joint Task Force-Civil Support, Fort Monroe, Virginia
- U.S. Army North, Fort Sam Houston, San Antonio, Texas
- Joint Force Headquarters National Capitol Region, Fort McNair, Washington, D.C.
- NGB, Arlington, Virginia
- Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Washington, D.C.
- U.S. Coast Guard Headquarters, Washington, D.C.
- Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Washington, D.C.

We also conducted semistructured telephone interviews with the state adjutants general, also known as TAGs, from Florida, Indiana, Nebraska, and Washington.

To determine the extent to which NORTHCOM is coordinating with the states, we surveyed the TAGs who are within NORTHCOM's area of responsibility. We asked respondents about their familiarity and involvement in NORTHCOM's homeland defense plan and the defense support of civil authorities plan. We also asked about their experiences in



working and communicating with NORTHCOM, including their participation in NORTHCOM exercises and involvement of NORTHCOM in their state exercises. The questionnaire and survey responses can be found in appendix I. We sent a questionnaire to TAGs of all 49 states in NORTHCOM's area of responsibility and the District of Columbia.<sup>1</sup>

The self-administered electronic survey was sent via electronic mail to the TAGs and their chiefs of staff. More specifically, we sent the questionnaire by e-mail in an attached Microsoft Word form that respondents could return electronically after marking checkboxes or entering narrative responses into open answer boxes. Alternatively, respondents could return it by mail after printing the form and completing it by hand. We sent the original electronic questionnaire on April 4, 2007. We sent out reminder e-mail messages, with replacement surveys, at different time intervals to all nonrespondents in order to encourage a higher response rate. In addition, we made several courtesy telephone calls to nonrespondents to encourage their completion. All questionnaires were returned by September 19, 2007. We achieved a 100 percent response rate.

The survey used was not a sample survey because it included the universe of respondents. Therefore, the survey has no sampling errors. However, the practical difficulties of conducting any survey may introduce errors, commonly referred to as nonsampling errors. For example, difficulties in interpreting a particular question, sources of information available to respondents, or entering data into a database or analyzing them can introduce unwanted variability into the survey results. We took steps in developing the questionnaire, collecting the data, and analyzing them to minimize such nonsampling errors. For example, social science survey specialists designed the questionnaire in collaboration with GAO staff who had subject matter expertise. In addition to an internal expert technical review by GAO's Survey Coordination Group, we pretested the survey with two TAGs by telephone to ensure that the questions were relevant, clearly stated, and easy to understand. Since there were relatively few changes based on the pretests and we were conducting surveys with the universe of respondents, we did not find it necessary to conduct additional pretests. Instead, changes to the content and format of the questionnaire were made after the pretests based on the feedback we received. When we analyzed the data, an independent analyst checked all computer programs. All data

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<sup>1</sup>Since Hawaii falls under U.S. Pacific Command's area of responsibility, it was not within the scope of this study.

were double keyed during the data-entry process, and GAO staff verified a sample of the resulting data to ensure accuracy.

In addition to analyzing the frequency and distribution of marked checkbox survey responses, we also analyzed the open-ended narrative survey responses for trends and recurring themes. For instance, although we did not directly ask a question about the defense coordinating officers (DCO) now located in each FEMA region, the DCOs were cited several times by TAGs as improving their communications with NORTHCOM. When the TAGs were not in agreement or had different perspectives on issues, we also summarized conflicting responses to illustrate the complexity of NORTHCOM's unique relationship with the states and any ongoing efforts to resolve these issues. For example, some TAGs believed that NGB should be the state's primary channel of communication with NORTHCOM, but others disagreed.

To determine the extent to which NORTHCOM is coordinating with the states and NGB, we reviewed plans, guidance, and other documents, including the memorandum of agreement between NORTHCOM and NGB. In addition, we conducted semistructured interviews with officials from NORTHCOM and several of its subordinate commands, including the Joint Task Force-Civil Support, Joint Force Headquarters National Capitol Region, and Army Forces North, as well as officials from NGB headquarters and the NORTHCOM National Guard Office. We also conducted interviews with the officials from FEMA and DHS's interagency Incident Management Planning Team. Additionally, we observed a major exercise (Ardent Sentry/Northern Edge) in the Indianapolis area in May 2007.

We conducted our review from April 2007 to April 2008 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

# Appendix III: Comments from the Department of Defense



HOMELAND  
DEFENSE

ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE  
2600 DEFENSE PENTAGON  
WASHINGTON, DC 20301-2600

APR 1 2008

Ms. Davi M. D'Agostino  
Director, Defense Capabilities and Management  
U.S. Government Accountability Office  
441 G Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Ms. D'Agostino:

The Department of Defense response to the Government Accountability Office draft report GAO-08-252, "HOMELAND DEFENSE: Steps Have Been Taken to Improve U.S. Northern Command's Coordination with States and the National Guard Bureau, But Gaps Remain", dated February 26, 2008 is attached.

The Department appreciates the opportunity to review and comment on the draft report.

Sincerely,

Paul McHale

Enclosure:  
As stated

**GAO DRAFT REPORT – DATED FEBRUARY 26, 2008  
GAO 08-252 / (351091)**

**“HOMELAND DEFENSE: Steps Have Been Taken to Improve U.S.  
Northern Command’s Coordination with States and the National Guard  
Bureau, But Gaps Remain”**

**DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE COMMENTS  
TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

**RECOMMENDATION 1:** GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense direct United States Northern Command (USNORTHCOM) to develop an established and thorough process to guide its coordination with the states, including provisions for:

- involving the states in USNORTHCOM planning process,
- obtaining information on state emergency response plans and capabilities, and
- using such information to improve the development and execution of its concept plans.

**DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE RESPONSE:** Partially concur. The Department of Defense (DoD) agrees that an established and thorough planning process should be developed to guide the coordination between the local, state and federal governments. This process should include United States Northern Command, United States Pacific Command, and United States Southern Command. The DoD is coordinating with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in developing this process and a comprehensive planning solution that empowers state emergency planners to participate with a synchronized system of plans that integrates federal, state, and local operational capabilities to affect a coordinated national response.

Homeland Security Presidential Directive 8, Annex 1 requires DHS to produce an Integrated Planning System (IPS). The Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Homeland Defense and Americas’ Security Affairs, the Joint Staff, USNORTHCOM, and National Guard Bureau are in coordination with the DHS in developing the IPS. The IPS will consist of federal, state and local planning, and a vertical and horizontal integration process. The IPS will provide all of the combatant commands and in particular USNORTHCOM information on state emergency response plans and their capabilities. The IPS will support combatant commands with improving the development and execution of their concept plans.

The coordination and planning process between the combatant commands and the states will become fully integrated through the efforts of the Defense Coordinating Officer (DCO) and the Emergency Preparedness Liaison Officer (EPLO). There is a permanently assigned DCO and Regional EPLO at each of the 10 Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Regional Response Coordination Centers (RRCCs). Additionally, there are State EPLOs assigned to the National Guard's Joint Force Headquarters – State, or State Emergency Operations Center in each State, territory, and the District of Columbia. The DCOs and the Regional and State EPLOs will facilitate the process of coordinating emergency response plans and capabilities between the combatant commands and the States, territories and the District of Columbia.

In order to better integrate the planning activities of the DCOs and EPLOs the DoD has recently proposed a planning concept called Task Force for Emergency Response (TFER). The TFER concept is currently under review by DoD interagency partners.

**RECOMMENDATION 2:** GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense direct USNORTHCOM and National Guard Bureau to revise the Memorandum of Agreement or develop an alternative document to include fully and clearly defined roles and responsibilities for USNORTHCOM, National Guard Bureau and the National Guard Bureau office located at USNORTHCOM.

**DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE RESPONSE:** Concur. A revision to the Memorandum of Agreement between USNORTHCOM and National Guard Bureau is in coordination.

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# Appendix IV: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

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## GAO Contact

Davi M. D'Agostino, (202) 512-5431 or [dagonstinod@gao.gov](mailto:dagonstinod@gao.gov)

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## Acknowledgments

In addition to the contact named above, Lorelei St. James, Assistant Director; Yecenia Camarillo; Joanna Chan; Angela Jacobs; David Keefer; Joseph Kirschbaum; Joanne Landesman; Erin Noel; Terry Richardson; and Jena Whitley made key contributions to this report.

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# Related GAO Products

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*Homeland Defense: U.S. Northern Command Has Made Progress but Needs to Address Force Allocation, Readiness Tracking Gaps, and Other Issues.* [GAO-08-251](#). Washington, D.C.: April 16, 2008.

*Homeland Security: DHS Improved its Risk-Based Grant Programs' Allocation and Management Methods, But Measuring Programs' Impact on National Capabilities Remains a Challenge.* [GAO-08-488T](#). Washington, D.C.: March 11, 2008.

*Department of Homeland Security: Progress Made in Implementation of Management and Mission Functions, but More Work Remains.* [GAO-08-457T](#). Washington, D.C.: February 13, 2008.

*Influenza Pandemic: Opportunities Exist to Address Critical Infrastructure Protection Challenges That Require Federal and Private Sector Coordination.* [GAO-08-36](#). Washington, D.C.: October 31, 2007.

*Homeland Security: Preliminary Information on Federal Actions to Address Challenges Faced by State and Local Information Fusion Centers.* [GAO-07-1241T](#). Washington, D.C.: September 27, 2007.

*Influenza Pandemic: Opportunities Exist to Clarify Federal Leadership Roles and Improve Pandemic Planning.* [GAO-07-1257T](#). Washington, D.C.: September 26, 2007.

*Department of Homeland Security: Progress Report on Implementation of Mission and Management Functions.* [GAO-07-1240T](#). Washington, D.C.: September 18, 2007.

*Homeland Security: Observations on DHS and FEMA Efforts to Prepare for and Respond to Major and Catastrophic Disasters and Address Related Recommendations and Legislation.* [GAO-07-1142T](#). Washington, D.C.: July 31, 2007.

*Influenza Pandemic: DOD Combatant Commands' Preparedness Efforts Could Benefit from More Clearly Defined Roles, Resources, and Risk Mitigation.* [GAO-07-696](#). Washington, D.C.: June 20, 2007.

*Reserve Forces: Actions Needed to Identify National Guard Domestic Equipment Requirements and Readiness.* [GAO-07-60](#). Washington, D.C.: January 26, 2007.

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*Chemical and Biological Defense: Management Actions Are Needed to Close the Gap between Army Chemical Unit Preparedness and Stated National Priorities.* [GAO-07-143](#). Washington, D.C.: January 19, 2007.

*Reserve Forces: Army National Guard and Army Reserve Readiness for 21st Century Challenges.* [GAO-06-1109T](#). Washington, D.C.: September 21, 2006.

*Catastrophic Disasters: Enhanced Leadership, Capabilities, and Accountability Controls Will Improve the Effectiveness of the Nation's Preparedness, Response, and Recovery System.* [GAO-06-618](#). Washington, D.C.: September 6, 2006.

*Coast Guard: Observations on the Preparation, Response, and Recovery Missions Related to Hurricane Katrina.* [GAO-06-903](#). Washington, D.C.: July 31, 2006.

*Homeland Defense: National Guard Bureau Needs to Clarify Civil Support Teams' Mission and Address Management Challenges.* [GAO-06-498](#). Washington, D.C.: May 31, 2006.

*Hurricane Katrina: Better Plans and Exercises Need to Guide the Military's Response to Catastrophic Natural Disasters.* [GAO-06-808T](#). Washington, D.C.: May 25, 2006.

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